

A Consumer's Guide to

Acupuncture and Asian Medicine



California Department of Consumer Affairs
ACUPUNCTURE BOARD



The mission of the California Acupuncture Board is to benefit, educate, and protect the public through regulation of licensure; development of education standards; provision of consumer information; and enforcement of the Acupuncture Licensure Act.

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at www.acupuncture.ca.gov.**

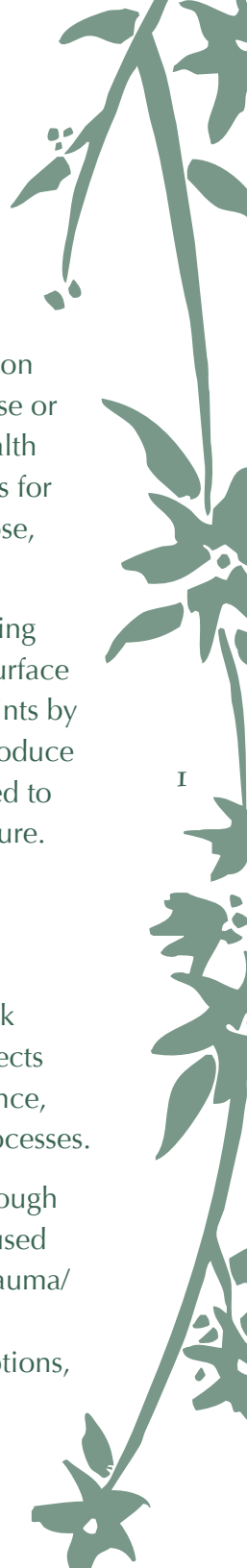
What is Acupuncture and Asian Medicine?

The theory and practice of acupuncture is based on Asian medicine (also known as traditional Chinese or Oriental medicine), a comprehensive natural health care system that has been used in Asian countries for thousands of years to preserve health and diagnose, treat, and prevent illness.

Acupuncture treats health conditions by stimulating “acu-points” found at specific locations on the surface of the body. Acupuncturists stimulate the acu-points by inserting very thin needles through the skin to produce physiological effects. Other methods are also used to stimulate acu-points, such as heat or finger pressure.

The general theory of acupuncture is that proper physiological function and health depend on the circulation of nutrients, substances, and energy called Qi (pronounced “chee”) through a network of “channels” or “meridians.” This network connects every organ and part of the body, providing balance, regulation, and coordination of physiological processes.

Pain and ill health result when the flow of Qi through the body is disrupted or blocked. This can be caused by many things, including disease, pathogens, trauma/injuries, and medication (side effects), as well as lifestyle factors such as overwork, poor diet, emotions, lack of rest, and stress.



Stimulation of the appropriate acu-points through acupuncture treatments helps to restore sufficient, continuous, and even flow of Qi and other nutrients

throughout the body, restoring health and balance to the body while relieving pain and other symptoms.

The acupuncturist uses a sophisticated and complex

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system of diagnostic methods that take into consideration the person as a whole, discerning the body's pattern of disharmony rather than isolated symptoms. The aim is not only to eliminate or alleviate symptoms, but more importantly to treat the underlying cause, increase the ability to function, and improve the quality of life.

Acupuncture and Asian medicine is one of the newest primary health care professions in California. The potential benefits of acupuncture are widely recognized, and it is steadily being integrated with mainstream health care. More than 15 million Americans have tried acupuncture and Asian medicine since it was introduced in the United States in the 1970s. The risk of side effects from acupuncture is low and the potential benefits are high. Knowing what

to expect from acupuncture will help patients get the most benefit from their treatments. The purpose of this booklet is to help consumers approach acupuncture treatment from an informed perspective.

Endorsement by the National Institutes of Health

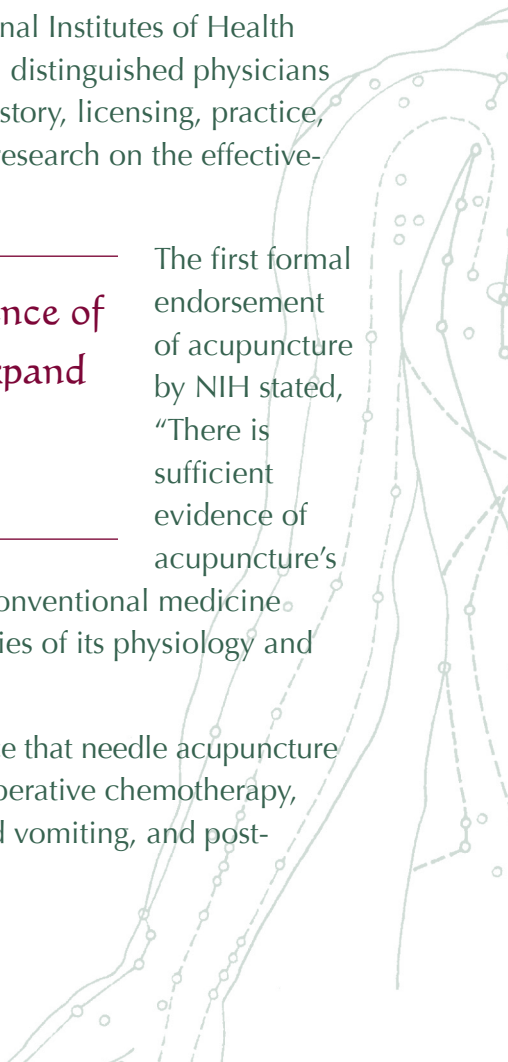
In November 1997, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) convened a panel of 12 distinguished physicians and scientists to review the history, licensing, practice, and current status of clinical research on the effectiveness of acupuncture.

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The first formal endorsement of acupuncture by NIH stated, “There is sufficient evidence of acupuncture’s

value to expand its use into conventional medicine and to encourage further studies of its physiology and clinical value.”

The panel found clear evidence that needle acupuncture is effective for relief of post-operative chemotherapy, pregnancy-related nausea and vomiting, and post-



operative dental pain. Other benefits from acupuncture which are still under consideration include relief of post-operative pain, addiction, stroke rehabilitation, carpal tunnel syndrome, osteoarthritis, headache, tennis elbow, fibromyalgia, menstrual cramps, and asthma. The panel noted that the World Health Organization identified more than 40 conditions for which acupuncture may be helpful. The panel found that one of the advantages of acupuncture is that the incidence of adverse effects is substantially lower than that of many drugs or other accepted medical procedures used for the same condition.

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Licensed Acupuncturists in California

The State of California began licensing acupuncturists in 1976, and in 1979 was the first state in the nation to recognize qualified practitioners as primary health care professionals. To qualify for licensing in California, individuals must meet specified educational requirements and pass a comprehensive State licensing examination. Once licensed, acupuncturists are required to renew their license every two years and complete continuing education as a condition of renewal. Licensed acupuncturists are required to post their license in a conspicuous location in their place of business.



What to Expect From Acupuncture Treatment

Knowing what to expect from an acupuncture treatment will make you feel more comfortable about the experience.

Determine Your Goals Are you looking for a primary health care practitioner, or someone to work with your current physician? Are you seeking short-term treatment for a specific complaint, or do you want the prevention-oriented, holistic approach to the health of mind, body, and spirit that acupuncture and Asian medicine can provide? Knowing what your expectations are—and communicating them to your practitioner—will help you get the most from your treatment.

Select a Practitioner Ask your friends, relatives, doctor, or your health plan for a referral to a reputable practitioner. You can access a list of professional associations or verify a license through the California Acupuncture Board's Web site at www.acupuncture.ca.gov.

Once you have a list of names, call the practitioners' offices and ask questions. Find out about their training, length of practice, which aspects of acupuncture and Asian medicine they employ, any specializations, and their experience in treating your ailment. You may also want to ask about the cost of treatment.

Diagnosis An acupuncturist's diagnosis is determined in part by using methods similar to other health care practitioners: Asking patients for a thorough history of their health, diet, exercise patterns, and chief complaints; performing a physical exam, ordering laboratory tests, X-rays or MRIs, and making a referral to a specialist, if necessary. The acupuncturist also uses unique diagnostic techniques, for example, taking the patient's pulse on both wrists and observing the tongue and complexion. The three pulses felt on each wrist are believed to correspond to certain organs and functions. Following the diagnosis, the practitioner should explain to you the nature of your problem, recommend a treatment plan, and give you an anticipated prognosis (outcome).

Being informed and understanding what to expect will make you feel more comfortable about the experience.

Treatment Procedures Modern acupuncture needles are stainless steel, and are between one-half and three inches long, ultra-fine, and quite flexible. They are pre-sterilized, non-toxic, and disposable (single-use). When the needles are tapped into the skin, there may not be any sensation. Much depends on the location (hands and feet tend to be more sensitive),

the condition being treated, and the acupuncturist's technique. Needles are typically placed in several acu-points and are usually left in about 20 to 40 minutes. The goal is to normalize the circulation of Qi and blood by stimulating the energy point, which encourages the body's natural healing process. Stimulation can be done by rotating the needles manually or attaching electrodes to send a weak electric current through the needles (electroacupuncture).

The number of treatments needed depends upon the duration, severity, and nature of your health condition. Two or three treatments may be sufficient for an acute condition, while a series of five to 15 treatments may be needed to resolve chronic conditions. Some degenerative conditions may require ongoing treatments over a long period of time.

Other techniques may include moxibustion (burning herbs to heat acu-points), cupping (suction), auricular therapy (ear acupuncture), *tui na* (Asian massage), and acupressure.

Patients should evaluate their progress after each session. Some relief should be apparent in two or three sessions, or six to eight sessions for more pervasive conditions. If you see encouraging signs, stick with it. Ask your practitioner questions about your treatment and improvement. If your response to treatment is not satisfactory, the practitioner may consider further diagnostic exams, modify the treatment plan, or refer to an appropriate practitioner, if necessary.



Treatment Precautions Having an acupuncture treatment if you are very hungry or tired is not recommended.

If you see encouraging signs, stick with it. Ask your practitioner questions about your treatment and improvement.

Occasionally, some bruising may occur after treatment. If you have a bleeding disorder or are on blood thinning medications, you should inform your acupuncturist before undergoing treatment.

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If you are pregnant or have a pacemaker, tell the acupuncturist so that the appropriate herbs and acu-points will be chosen.

Herbal Therapy In the course of your treatment Chinese herbal remedies may be prescribed. They may be dispensed as raw herbs or in pills, capsules, granules, or tinctures which make them easier to ingest. Most herbal formulas can treat a wide variety of symptoms while stimulating the body's natural healing process.

Acupuncturists are the only licensed health care professionals in California who are required to be trained and tested for competency in prescribing herbal medicine. Chinese herbal medicine has been practiced safely and effectively for centuries and has the greatest potential for beneficial results when prescribed by

a trained professional who recognizes both the benefits and risks.

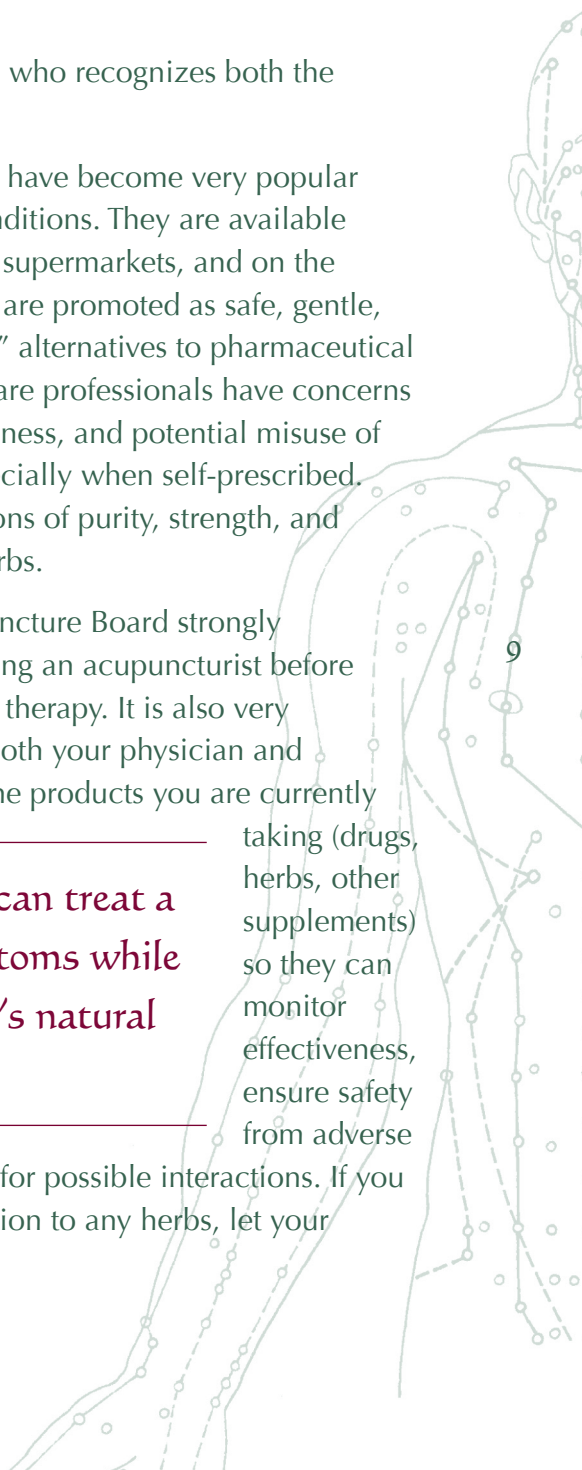
In recent years, herbs have become very popular to self-treat many conditions. They are available in health food stores, supermarkets, and on the Internet. While herbs are promoted as safe, gentle, inexpensive, “natural” alternatives to pharmaceutical drugs, many health care professionals have concerns about safety, effectiveness, and potential misuse of herbal products, especially when self-prescribed. There are also questions of purity, strength, and standardization of herbs.

The California Acupuncture Board strongly recommends consulting an acupuncturist before beginning any herbal therapy. It is also very important to inform both your physician and acupuncturist of all the products you are currently

Most herb formulas can treat a wide variety of symptoms while stimulating the body's natural healing process.

taking (drugs, herbs, other supplements) so they can monitor effectiveness, ensure safety from adverse

reactions, and watch for possible interactions. If you have an allergic reaction to any herbs, let your acupuncturist know.



Conditions Treated

How effective the treatment is depends on the severity and nature of the condition being treated. Acupuncturists are trained to identify conditions that may require referral to a specialist, so it is important for you to provide detailed information about your condition so that important medical problems are not overlooked.

If you are under the simultaneous care of different health practitioners, it is important to keep all of them informed about your treatments to ensure there are no adverse interactions.

The following is a list of health conditions commonly treated by licensed acupuncturists.

- allergies/asthma
- anxiety/depression
- arthritis/joint problems
- back pain
- bladder/kidney problems
- constipation/diarrhea
- colds/influenza
- cough/bronchitis
- dizziness
- drug/alcohol/smoking addiction
- fatigue
- gastrointestinal disorders
- gynecological disorders
- headache/migraine
- heart problems/palpitations
- high blood pressure
- immune system deficiency
- knee pain
- menopausal discomfort
- musculoskeletal injuries
- pre-menstrual syndrome
- paralysis/numbness
- rhinitis
- sciatica
- sexual dysfunction
- side effects of chemotherapy
- sinusitis
- skin problems
- stress/tension
- stroke rehabilitation
- tendonitis

It is important to keep all your providers informed about your treatments.

Who Can Benefit From Treatment?

Patients of acupuncture range from infants to senior citizens. They may be seeking an alternative to Western medicine or it may be their last hope for relief, having exhausted other methods of treatment for a chronic condition. Or, an acupuncturist may be their first choice of health care practitioner for a low-risk form of treatment with few side effects.

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What About Insurance Coverage?

Some California insurance plans include acupuncture treatment in their policies. Ask your insurer about coverage or reimbursement. Some plans that do not routinely cover acupuncture may pay for treatments if they are recommended by a physician. Many acupuncturists are providers for traditional PPO and HMO plans. Acupuncturists are currently covered under California State Medi-Cal and Worker's Compensation (Note: Subsequent laws passed by the California Legislature may affect this coverage.)

California Acupuncture Board

The California Acupuncture Board (Board) licenses and regulates the profession according to the Acupuncture Licensure Act, which identifies acupuncture as a primary health care profession. The Board is an autonomous body within the Department of Consumer Affairs. The primary responsibility of the Board is to protect consumers from incompetent, unprofessional, and fraudulent practitioners.

The Board establishes standards for the approval of educational programs, oversees the administration of the licensing examination, issues new and renewal licenses, and handles enforcement issues when complaints are received. The Board strives to promote safe practice through the improvement of educational training standards.

For complete information on the responsibilities of the California Acupuncture Board, please visit the Board's Web site at www.acupuncture.ca.gov.

How Are Complaints Filed?

A complaint should be filed by anyone who believes that a licensed acupuncturist engaged in illegal or unethical activities related to their professional responsibilities. Anyone may file a complaint, and the Board reviews each complaint received.

The most effective complaints are those that contain first-hand, verifiable information.

All complaints **MUST** be in writing and include the names, addresses, and phone numbers of both the complainant and the licensee. Please explain, in your

own words, the nature and facts of your complaint. Include as much information as possible, including any documentary evidence available. You may file a complaint online or use the consumer complaint form found on the Board’s Web site under the tab “Consumers.”

The most effective complaints are those that contain first-hand, verifiable information. While anonymous complaints will be reviewed, they may be impossible to pursue without documented evidence of the allegations made.

Complaints should be sent to:

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